

# bmj.com news roundup

Full versions of these stories are available at: [bmj.com/content/vol324/issue7336/#NEWS\\_ROUNDUP](http://bmj.com/content/vol324/issue7336/#NEWS_ROUNDUP)

## "No star" NHS trust slated by CHI report

A trust which was given a "no star" rating for its performance by the Department of Health in September has come under attack again—this time from the Commission for Health Improvement.

A commission report, published this week, criticises the Brighton Health Care NHS Trust for the long waits in accident and emergency, the poor environment for women in the breast screening clinic, and its system for admitting patients for elective surgery.

Occupancy rates are so high that patients have to phone the hospital in the afternoon on the day of admission to see if a bed is available for them that night, it says. Sometimes they have to wait until 9 pm before knowing whether they can be admitted.

But it did praise the trust for its friendly and dedicated staff, good training programme, and bereavement support group for patients, the Good Grief programme.

Lynn Eaton *London*

## Women more likely than men to die after heart surgery

Women have as much as a three times higher risk than men of dying during or shortly after coronary artery bypass surgery, even though their coronary atherosclerosis may be less extensive and their heart pumping action may be better, a US study shows (*Circulation* 2002;105:1176-81).

Authors of the study, led by Dr Viola Vaccarino of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, reviewed records of 51 187 patients in the National Cardiovascular Network database who underwent cardiac bypass surgery at 23 medical centres between October 1993 and December 1999. Thirty per cent (15 178) of these were women.

"The younger the patients, the greater the mortality difference between women and men," said



RAYMOND RUTTING

## Netherlands to run trials of marijuana in patients with multiple sclerosis

The Dutch government has announced a small scale crossover trial into the effect of three sorts of medical marijuana, plus a placebo, on 16 patients with multiple sclerosis.

Two foundations in Rotterdam, the Institute for Medical Marijuana and Maripharm, have been contracted by the government to produce the drug to a standard quality and provide metal pipes for inhalation.

A Bureau for Medical Cannabis, set up by the ministry and the Amsterdam's Free University medical centre, will run the year's trial.

The bureau also intends to make medicinal cannabis available through pharmacists on prescription by spring 2003. The Dutch cabinet recently agreed to change the law to permit this.

Four trials of cannabis are taking place in the United Kingdom. The cannabis in multiple sclerosis (CAMS) study, which is sponsored by the Medical Research Council, started at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, last year and aims to take in 660 participants in 40 centres.

Three smaller phase II trials—in Guernsey, Oxford, and Norfolk—have been under way since autumn 2000, examining a sublingual spray developed from plants grown by G W Pharmaceuticals in Kent. The researchers expect to extend these trials to 2000 patients over two years and to enrol not only people with multiple sclerosis but also patients with various chronic pain syndromes, such as neuralgia and lower back pain.

Tony Sheldon *Utrecht*

Dr Vaccarino, associate professor of medicine at Emory's medical school and associate professor of epidemiology at its Rollins School of Public Health. She could not explain this difference.

"In all age groups, women had less severe coronary artery disease and higher left ventricular ejection fraction and had less often a prior history of MI [myocardial infarction] or CABG [coronary artery bypass graft] compared with men," said the study.

"It seems paradoxical, but that's what the data show," said Dr Vaccarino.

David Spurgeon *Quebec*

## Israel stops private medical services in state hospitals

Private medical services launched without official approval six years ago in hospitals owned by the Israeli government will have to shut down by 30 April.

The services, known by their Hebrew acronym "sharap," have been provided in five of Israel's largest state hospitals. The cancellation of the services is the result of a 49 page ruling by attorney general Elyakim Rubin-

stein and months of deliberations about the controversial subject.

Sharap began informally, without official authorisation, in the mid-1990s in state hospitals in the metropolitan area of Tel Aviv and in Haifa. Patients who wanted to see specific doctors were told to deposit money in fictitious "research funds," and the proceeds were then divided between the more experienced physicians. These payments sometimes also shortened the wait to see a doctor or have an operation.

The attorney general's ruling leaves the door open for a new form of private medical practice that would allow paying patients to choose their consultants or surgeons, but not to see them faster than patients who do not pay.

Judy Siegel-Itzkovich *Jerusalem*

## Surgeon criticised for transplant operation

A senior surgeon in Germany has come under fire for going ahead with a kidney transplant operation using an organ from a living donor—despite the proposed operation being opposed by colleagues in psychological medicine and the ethics committee of the regional medical council.

The surgical university hospital in Essen, where surgeon Christoph Broelsch is director, was approached by a dialysis patient from Israel who said his cousin from Moldavia, who was 30 years younger, wanted to donate his kidney.

In 15 out of Germany's 16 states, transplant law requires, in the case of living donors, that an independent committee ensures that there is no commercial basis to the donation and that there are emotional and personal ties between donor and recipient. None were found in this case, so the patient's request was refused. He decided to resort to a hospital in the one state without such a rule, Thuringia. He went to the surgical university hospital in Jena, where he was accepted and where Professor Broelsch carried out the operation.

The medical director of Essen University Hospital, Werner Havers, rejected any suspicion that the operation had involved any commercial trade in organs